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# Struggle

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**Struggle**

Poetry by Thomas C. Jones

Thomas Jones  
5-92

# **Struggle**

A Collection of Poetry  
by, Thomas C. Jones

Thesis for Southern Illinois University  
University Honors Program  
1992  
Thesis Director, Rodney Jones

**Struggle**

## Struggle

Poems by Thomas C. Jones, collected 1992

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One

## A Sissy at Family Dinner

We wear the mask that grins and lies...

Paul Laurence Dunbar

I wear the weight of my life  
draped along my skinny shoulder-line  
like a yoke-styled stole. At dinner,  
with bowls of black-eyed peas, lettuce glaring  
with oil and vinegar, roasted beefs plain  
on family plates, all the silverware sharpened  
on the whetstone tongues and pallets of father  
mother grandfather aunt uncle, here I pose myself,  
a numb boy in a chair; or hide myself, a little fool  
masturbating in a corner.

I wear the weight of my life  
and don't wince in the face of anybody; strong  
in mute calm, not belonging to the family  
I was born into, but screwed to their table, plump  
as a dumpling, smiling like a pig's head; I am here,  
prepared, whipped and buttered; I am sleeping in the soup,  
the beef heart that makes the turtle mock; my lungs  
are fish out of water, breathing asthmatic  
as gospel static in the black iron skillet,  
never in song,  
but in an even unaffected hum  
under the breath of this house at dinner.

## Cleopatra

I saw Claudette Colbert when I was eight  
years old and said my death will come  
in a basket of snakes. Everywhere, I saw asps,  
in babydoll bottles, crowding  
toward the nipple; I saw them as African  
beans, long and sullen in my mother's soup,  
darting at her when the spoon broke  
the surface, biting her tongue and coiling  
into a mouthful of viscious spit curls;  
I saw them fastened around my father's  
wrists, under the starched cuffs of the shirt  
the mortician picked out, scouring  
off the bland makeup to expose simple  
scars, fastidiously cut.

Elizabeth Taylor in 1964 lounged with Richard  
Burton and I was married  
to a man weak like my father, baking hams  
and cobblers, crying for babies,  
groping my pregnant stomach from behind  
as if *he* was carrying. I could snap  
my fingers and he would dance like Cleopatra's  
chorus line of girls clad in their Egyptian  
gowns of golden cutlery; and I would laugh,  
lift my maternity blouse and say Dance,  
you idiot, dance for the kingdom  
you can never know. I didn't want  
the child, I didn't want my breasts  
too swollen to force into the mouths  
of asps, small as keyholes; I wanted  
to die before I let any part of myself  
be taken, even by a weak man.



Thomas C. Jones

The Evenings and the Nights of Cole Porter  
Years After the Accident

1.

Across the shoulder of a young valet,  
his legs dangle like jelly-blooded nerves  
unnerved. Society friends pace the hall  
with black-tie poise- Truman, Kitty Carlisle-  
convened at this iron lung of a suite  
only to wait for their crippled host  
to be carried, propped like a Queen Anne chair  
at the dining room table. Pallid-tongued  
for his Waldorf pageant, host Cole doesn't speak  
finding his guests' gossip flat as spoiled cordial.

But he keeps his high-town style, his suit sealed  
tight as an envelope, with lap blankets  
veneering his dead-fish thighs as fresh or  
solid, the mangled things, their bones crushed to powder,  
made love to twice by a riding horse that  
rolled over and over on poor Cole Porter.

2.

He crawls with the grain of the floor  
to get to the naked actor across the room  
who says,  
*Do you want this cock? Come get this cock.*

Under the double-crescent arch of two potent legs  
Cole is the size of a small lizard, squat on his stomach,  
his eyes revolving up to the man he knows  
will step away, baiting Cole with a nightly song- *Drag those  
crippled legs like an old bridal train if you want me  
tonight.* And Cole does, pulling himself around the room  
for half an hour  
until the man gives in with gestures  
that, in the mind of Cole Porter, lather  
the mere julienned slivers of his legs into bulk  
he can stand on, upright  
and deserving.

Talking with a Hitchhiker  
While Pumping Gas at a Station  
Outside of Town

I aint going into town, Mister,  
I said to this long sassy rifle of a man.  
*You aint, huh?            Alright.*  
And the numbers rolled over to 5, uh-Hummm.  
He stopped, his arms rolling like water  
in a halted bucket,     *Oobaby,*  
*say that Umhummm sweetness again!*

uh-Hummmmm...

*Sounds so good. Whats yo name?*  
My name dont matter, I said.  
*Why dont you let me rape you?*  
You hafta ask permission?  
*Let me rape you, baby.*  
Honey, cant rape the willin.  
*Gimme some a that smile.*  
What you gon do with it?  
*Put my stuff in it. thats what.*

be Fiiiine.

He wanted to stake some roadside,  
unbusy with squad traffic, I got work  
right now, I said.     (What he carried,  
truck stop diseases, city cracked mind-set,  
the brazen truth lawzy me between us.)  
*I got to get rid of this, now. There*  
*an amtrak we could hook at?            Yes I*  
said 10:30 tonight, leaving him, hearing  
as I hurried into town, that train  
that old train  
steaming out of its railroad yard.

## O Heavy Horse

I am watching you from the ground,        your muscles  
moving like suede-masked stratus crashing smoothly  
into earthquakes        as you run my way        as you  
carry the man I want

O heavy horse,        to know his straddle I'd sell my soul,  
his rump solid on my pommeled spine,        to have his  
girthing legs gall me halt or move,        with all god  
in his leather-hemmed fist that opens on my neck  
like a careening wing.

Heavy horse,

I am watching you through the grass,        your gallop  
splitting land and shin as he drives you with a handsome  
slap; and upon me, I am bent for his mount, but he runs me  
down like a hound, cross this hog's back.

O heavy horse,        I am knowing the blur of your silk belly;  
the piss slapping me is hard applause, and I kiss hoof  
after hoof as I am being trampled, chattering and  
babbling *I love* and *yes* because I know this is the closest  
I will get to your rider.

Blanche DuBois

(for the Midwestern Drag Queen)

I am a big girl,  
and like Miss Ross says, *I'm the Boss*,  
so come here and suck your mama's  
stick-pussy, Mister Burly Man. Don't  
make me roll up these sequinned sleeves  
and dance your table down  
with my new vinyl stilettos size 11½,  
I know you gotta hard-on under there.

I feel the earth  
                    *move*  
                    under my feet,

D.J. play that machine. I'll teach  
Mr-John-Deere-straight-man where  
to plow his dirty back road, chile.  
I ain't some Friday night curiosity  
for you heterosexuals to sightsee  
and talk over Monday. I am a Queen,  
and before the doors close tonight,  
Mister, you'll suck this Queen's tit  
like a roasting pig with a silicone apple  
stuffed in your mouth, spread on the floor  
of this proud fiesta, the disco lights  
cracking across your back, you'll feel  
the sky tumbling down, *tum-buh-ling*  
                                    down.

Two

## Spring For My Grandfather

*April comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing flowers.*  
-Edna St. Vincent Millay

Rough and tumble, she says, diapering  
this eighty year old man, her husband, turning him  
from left side onto right side. His eyes are set  
in the indifferent gaze of the almost dead,  
fixed in ignorance as his wife takes a washrag  
to his dirty ass. She cries but says  
she doesn't mind a bit. She says  
now, when the sap comes up in the trees, is a bad time  
for the sick. She says that the change in season  
is bad for her husband's old bones.

His mind has been spoiling for three years,  
lagging behind in afternoon dreams about hospital  
rooms, his mother's kitchen, the tavern  
he tended since 1950. *Please let's go home,*  
he'd holler at his wife, *lock up the safe and let's go,*  
the rest of the day, carrying on, refusing  
the natural comfort of knowing his own house. Disregarding  
the couch, the drapes, dusted photos, everything  
but shadows.

Until shadows became cracks spreading into ditches  
across the floor, bundles of pajama bottoms in the corner,  
crouched thieves hiding under tables. He'd sit up  
in his chair talking, pinching folds in the afghan,  
giving his hand a tender kiss as if it belonged  
to some favored shy grandson. His black-slippered feet  
slack on his foot-stool were two little niggers,  
he'd say, kicking at them, two negroe children  
knocking over furniture.

Open your mouth little bird, she says,  
feeding her husband water in a spoon, his throat  
tight and thick with phlegm. At first, she says,  
I thought he was stubborn not swallowing,  
but he just gets choked on the meagerest  
taste. The old man keeps his eyes closed,  
his pulse is slow, pale skin wilted  
on his rawboned face, sunk in at the cheeks.  
She says, he's lost so much weight, you think  
you could hold him in your hand. And he opens  
his mouth for another cool sip.

## The Lettuce Bird

(for O.W.)

A frilled head, proud in its foliage,  
is folding in and on itself, over and over,  
like a hundred paper-thin hands clasped in one lap;  
one head in a bunch of root-necked bedded heads,  
open in their gaggle to an April sky  
and quickly coming to seed.

Her mother's mind kept the lettuce bird,  
yellow sprite in those relic eyes and flutter in the tongue.  
Outside the window that slants with old shack age,  
the blur of finches stealing June sun  
and snatching swelled black seeds tells her mother  
that spring is done.

Yeh mother, Opal says, yer bird right in season.  
Set ye up mother, I need ta warsh yer back. Yeh,  
today's the day 48 year ago Daddy died. God took him  
on an ol hot day lak today, poor man goin on he's cold.  
And my, my, those dirt daubers sure come out wi'the  
hot sun, spattin about. They work up in that attic  
enough. Mother? Hear their roarin?

August is hotter- brilliant as the coals,  
the orange jewels in the stove, burnt from oak; hotter  
than the preacher's truck last time he took them to town  
a year ago, when bicentennial celebrations and the county  
fair thickened traffic. They watched the Ferris wheel  
over the Dollar General Store turning like a bolted sunset.

Now her mother sings about Ezekial  
 seeing the wheel, *right in the middle of the air.*  
 She cools her mother with a picture-card fan from  
 a funeral home, and with cold rainwater drawn  
 from the dark heart of their ramshackled well  
 in which a neighbor's child once drowned.

The feather bed stinks with sweat and urine;  
 the odor between her mother's legs standing  
 like hackles on the mattress. She beats the smell out,  
 the flat of her hand crusty with damp baking soda,  
 her words harmonizing with the cackling of hens  
 under the house. Her mother asks, *Who's spilled kerosene?*

R'member mother, Opal says, it was War I.  
 They shipped that boy's casket back with militeery  
 orders ta keep it sealt. Yeh, sem virus. And when  
 the Carter family opened it anyways for the service,  
 well the whole town come down sick. No, we never caught it.  
 Eva the only town visitor we had then. After she left you  
 put yer felt mask on, sat us outside, burnt whole pound  
 a sulfur. Never saw the lak a dust, big yella clouds  
 in the winda, and Daddy said, Looks lak God's  
 pillar-cloud had settled in our house,  
 d'liverin us lak it did Moses.

Quilts are untrunked to smother November  
 drafts. Nerves pop with the kindling in the red  
 pot-belly. Grief goes fever. She soothes her mother's  
 moans in black moonless bed, their skins  
 touch smooth crackle like the rinds of cantaloupes  
 scrawled and veined; but she is not her mother's husband.



She is not comfort and sleeps with her back  
to her mother's, praying, like the night she was saved  
by God, who now hunched like a heavy-flowered stem  
her spine, it boning through her night slip sharp as a knuckle,  
but when she accepted God that night, she wanted to shout  
and witness, and her testimony became a church stone.

Tonight, she fears, her prayers are devil-talk,  
selfish and vain; asking God why was she always ugly;  
wanting to hide in the corner of the house her father  
was embalmed in, where the coffin was perched; and  
taunting God- What did the doctors do with it? In a jar,  
or buried, her cancered breast, rotted after two years?

It was her mother, still sharp then, and stout  
as a kettle, who dressed the skimmed wound  
with peroxide and gauze plumped into a small breast.  
It is her mother now whose mind fails, whose  
mouth talks mean all night, and who needs, only,  
the scrawny but gospel strength of her daughter.

Now mother, Opal says, you break my heart.  
You know you mean more ta me than any huzben  
e'er could. You're talkin out yer head. Hush now,  
keep the cover tight. Yeh, it's winter now and  
you're fevered. Should I boil you sem mullen tea?  
Hold on. What're ya wavin yer arms up fer? They  
ain't nothin peckin in yer hair. Oh mother, please,  
you ain't gonna die. Lie still. Don't carry on,  
they ain't no birds got in the house.

## Inspiration

They won't get out of the road, the buzzards  
all hunkered over, unstitching gizzards.  
My aunt and I in the car are silent,  
her tongue is cancered out, she is silent.  
The buzzards have the pious eyes of squabs  
set in burnt old turkey skins, with black straw  
for crudely feathered hides. Griefless around death,  
they pick at the mud-fat gut of a dog.

When aunt could speak, she would tell me stories  
of when she was young: "If buzzards circled  
the house, we knew that predicted viz'tors  
so mother cooked extra. And when buzzards  
perched our tree, undid their wingspans so slow,  
well, they was shakin' out the chill of storms  
and thunder, and we shut all our winders.  
Have you ever heard a buzzard? They blow

like crazy geese, *unholy*. Your uncle  
he left me widowed at twenty, stranded  
me desp'rate, grievin' so, that a neighbor  
who sold root salves and teas told me, *Young girl*  
*dance like a buzzard in your untilled field*  
*and you'll see your husband to say farewell.*  
Sin likes idiots, and under the moon  
that night I flopped and squalled in a fitful charleston

til early morning...all that showed int'rest  
was useless animals." But aunt is quiet  
as we slowly roll past this iron circle  
of hackled backs *immovable, royal,*  
in veils of lime barely raised, like instances  
or stories that turn against cloddish teeth  
out of habit, despite a dead tongue. Sweet  
inspiration is dumb as an animal's  
rotteness, protected by strong birds.

### 5 Voices

(for those starved into dogs)

I didn't know the boats  
my back sauteed in everybody's piss  
and all that african jibbermoaning  
in my ear, the skinny slave-man  
next to me choking on his own vomit,  
his ribs kicking against his skin  
and failing to hold his black body decently  
stout. What a sight. We're civilized  
now, though it took getting past plantations  
and into sharecrop shacks. We owe  
the white man. I love him. He  
took me into his house one day,  
gave me a drink of water  
from his own enamel kettle  
and standing there in his white trousers  
he told me Nigger, now you're  
pretty smart, and a good-looker  
too, built like something. You  
might do, he said, in this world.  
I love that man. He said I might  
do.

\*\*\*\*

### JAPS

Dont Let The Sun Set On You Here  
Keep Moving  
THIS IS ROSE HILL

The war missqueezed America's  
libertarian tit,  
we became poison in the melting pot.  
NO JAPS ALLOWED,  
but I wasn't Japanese.  
I spoke slang, I scolded  
the old language, I prayed  
to Mr. President, collected  
pounds of tin for spitfires.

I dream of setting up house  
in Rose Hill  
next door to this man, pale saddle-skinned  
attendant in a blue mechanic's suit.  
We were driving through,  
saw the sign but needed gas.  
The man, Texaco proud, varnished  
with the rich grime of buick engines,

wouldn't wait on us, suspecting,  
 I gathered, our extra ration  
 cards. I was proud when father  
 served himself only three gallons,  
 handed over the cash  
 and his government "A" card.  
 Save for the brave, I thought.  
 I leaned out my window,  
 13 then, and the man  
 he said, Hey fella, and he  
 showed his yellow teeth in a smile  
 that I was unaccustomed to, this  
 Chesterfield smile greased, tarred  
 with sweated down brilcream.  
 He got close, I thought he might kiss  
 me, his eyes might inspect mine  
 see I'm Joe like him. He smothered  
 my face with his petroleum-annointed hands,  
 his thick fingertips on my temples  
 and the heels of his palms  
 flush at my throat. Hey fella,  
 YOUR brother killed MINE.  
 And he pushed his open hands  
 into my face and down  
 pulling my skin, distorting  
 me ugly my vision he soared  
 into my bible-belt idol,  
 his smile a midwest tongue his hands  
 American and as he ruined my face  
 between his fingers ringing it new  
 with the slap of gas station aftershave,  
 the black cologne from chevrolets  
 squatted on their hydraulic pedestals,  
 as he remade my expression,  
     he said,  
*This way fella, with your eyes  
 pulled down, you almost look  
 alright.*

\*\*\*\*

I am lean, my silks  
 cost fortunes: panties, slips  
 corsets. I am *femme*  
*de creme*. Georgette. "Honey,  
 I can really do you," I say, "Let me  
 do you, Vinnie." I feel  
 like a queen of bone china  
 among these bulls of the barroom,  
 Vinnie and his friends, Sal,  
 the crudest, all of them

scummed muscles in condom  
 skin. But Vinnie, when I see  
 his shirt just slightly open  
 showing a sliver of his  
 man-oh-manliness, cleaved  
 and heaving broad  
 as a street-stone riped smooth  
 by the heels of whores like me,  
 well, I tell you,  
 I'd wear out the knees of my finest  
 new seamed hosiery just to worship  
 a small taste. Right now  
 I'm risking this old neighborhood,  
 giving up an evening  
 at Stewart's, our Manhattan  
 cocktail lounge, a fag's  
 grand central, all the girls  
 made over with Coty  
 "Air spun" corn silk, all crimsonly  
 lappelled, crepely waisted, toilet  
 watered with Yardley fragrances,  
 and, for a man, I am in Brooklyn.  
 "Let's go for a walk, Vincent,  
 the pills are up, I can see  
 straight, Vinnie,  
 as straight as a queen can see."

Brooklyn is strict  
 and Vinnie swallows it whole  
 every night. I know  
 he can never love a faggot  
 without rejecting him in the street.  
 I take the damn mockery, Sal  
 mulling the switchblade over my thigh;  
 I'll make you into a woman, he says,  
 and Vinnie laughs, I laugh,  
 game for the hyena emotion--  
 Sal, You couldn't make a woman  
 if she came with a tire pump  
 --until my woman's balls feel the point  
 through silk and corduroy, I shriek  
 for Vinnie and run outside, Vinnie!  
 But he is not a queer damsel's hero,  
 he is slapping the backs  
 of these hecklers rooting each other  
 into a straight and solid nest  
 around me, the switchblade pitched  
 from side to side off the cement  
 under my feet and I am dancing against  
 getting cut. Vinnie! I must look awful,  
 jerking like a grotesque little bobbin,

threaded to these animals, my humiliation  
dilated under the streetlights, I am  
gracelessly brought down.

Vinnie! He pulls out the blade  
from the trembling pulse in my leg.  
I lean on him, the only bit of hero,  
of nurse with tourniquet, he can ever give me  
here on the street, or anywhere;  
his heart is all cobble and fist,  
all liquor-blooded.  
He makes me give him money for a taxi,  
and Sal the Joke goes with us.  
They take the taxi back to their neighborhood.  
I wave, adieu, from my steps  
like a limp warred-upon queen,  
worthless and kingless,  
Georgette.

\*\*\*\*

The night we were uncattled  
from the train car, divided  
by the Nazis, scrubbed down  
with the last lye soap, the last  
wash-water we would see for months,  
that night, still a buxom Jewess,  
before my breasts gnarled into black potatoes,  
lice nesting in my rickety cleavage,  
before my elbow and knee bones  
became as obvious as Nazi fists  
swelling in my limbs, clenching thinnest  
my blood and muscle, and before  
my pelvis reduced to a drum  
wearily thumping hunger,  
hunger (Now I think  
they fed us their mud-water soup  
seasoned with alum as an experiment  
to see how ridiculously shriveled  
we would become)

but before  
all this, when I was new and cleaner,  
a guard raped me  
and promised I would live.  
He became my SS Angel  
those years in the camp.  
Even when he beat the others  
I remembered  
"You'll live," he said, "Obey  
and work hard."

I was grateful that my guard,  
so sturdy and woolen, spat  
his precious Aryan seed  
into what Nazis called  
the cunt of a half-caste.  
I felt protected, his semen  
formed a holy stone  
in the middle of my body,  
an unfeatured crystal baby  
that warded away brutality.

When he was fastening his belt,  
I asked him what  
reddened the sky over  
the north buildings of the camp,  
why the stoked volcano haze, he said "Oh,  
they are baking many loaves of bread  
for all of you to eat after you've worked."  
I didn't ask him why  
certain chimneys stank with smoke  
and others were clean; I believed  
they baked bread day and night, even  
when I never saw it or tasted  
it; even when I heard what  
was gassed and burned there, I held faith  
in my guard who never cussed me  
unless other guards were around.

And upon our liberation  
from the camps, when the allies  
gathered the living and buried  
the unburied dead, bodies  
weaved like garbled cursive  
across oceanic pits,  
I am now angered  
that the sight of a naked young woman  
center in one communal grave, her legs  
spread-eagled, her arms out  
wide over the other Jew skeletons,  
her mouth clenching a rotted tongue  
dry as dirt, angered  
that this evoked  
pity, that for her I regretted  
her not being raped,  
that I secretly hallowed  
a Nazi guard  
for molesting me into freedom.

\*\*\*\*

I am *not* worth an even nickel's sympathy.

because my mother's raw stomach  
is the hub of this house  
and I savor my first seconds against its hard fat;  
and my brother's long arms  
are tattooed with skulls  
that fit perfectly against the palms of my hands;  
because there are these moments I don't fight.

when in my mother's room,  
I roll with the stucco flowers  
from corner to corner,  
I am limber like the scrollwork  
across plastic dresser drawers,  
and on the strop-width of the leather belt  
she fastens around my naked waist,  
there are notches a man cut,  
probably my father,  
I think about those undated tallies,  
I squander with light across the ceiling.

in our room, later, my brother  
gets on top of me, every night  
I worry he won't pull it out in time,  
but the any-man's weight on me, I like, the veins  
his muscles press into my church-mouse breasts,  
and then I just want it over, when I  
hear the sagging siren of his breath, when  
he excuses himself with guilty lines  
stolen from my own abused diary  
and turned onto me easy as this:  
Great resistings, he says, are feeble,  
root-rotted by the smallest needs.  
I believe him.



Four

## Angels

1.

Chickenchickenchickenchick- Pop!

It's a dance, do the wringing, do the  
wild nerves around the barnyard,  
your orange feet jumping up and getting down  
around your own wrenched off fist-combed head  
as if it were a sombrero.

Some terrible angel- madly scratching calligraphy  
in the hen-pen dirt  
and dotting all the fine i's with blood  
from a fountaining neck.

2.

Boils work pot bottom up;

In a quick rash on the skin of the water  
they break into steam the odor of pig's breath,  
they carry on their shoulder's in victory  
the hog's head split in two and cleaned,  
they dance the lean and fat loose from the skull  
and kiss the ears and snout tender.

Jaws turn over a bowl,

grinding out the fat and chopped suet  
into an obscure clay sowed with tart apples,  
sweet currants, raisins, oranges and lemons,  
with sugar and nutmeg and mace, then poured  
into a deep pie-shell as mincemeat and baked  
until every taste of blood and life is sweet.

Knives slice dessert, meat pie.

## Holy Endurance

Fennel seeds in stone-hard bread, I feel  
the knife grunt on their sternness

slicing through, the seeds refusing  
to give over to dissection of body  
or taste. My kitchen table is small

without its leaf, small enough for one,  
a single boiled egg and a saucer of heavy  
toast too dense with wheat. I

try to remember what book in the Bible  
praises the mustard seed, another  
stubborn wallop of a spice. Nobody

gives in. Anymore I admire  
the small tasteless bits of backbone  
trapped in fried salmon cakes. They

have no pretense, no holy endurance,  
are crushable by the weakest tongue. Days  
and days I wish for fainting spells,

to double over my cart in the store,  
and fall back across the piled onions  
with no thought of what the boys might think

of me, stocking their shelves with canned soups  
or pickled pigs' ears or common peas. I  
want at crowded auctions to give myself

to the cancerous heat of summer, let my skin  
burn, and sweat take me over without  
reaching to fix my hair, without suspecting

every old man of leering at my pigeon chest  
to decide my gender. I sit here  
at my breakfast, at home with isolation,

with my flaws, dreading to rise  
and glare like the sun in the company  
of bank ladies I work with and our bosses

and the people withdrawing,  
depositing, I must seem as composed  
as a powdered nose. No anxiety must show.

Nothing to ever invite the derogatory. I lock  
my door, leaving, fighting all my strength  
for one luxurious moment of collapse.

Find me on my doorstep, a heap  
of queerness finally broken open.

## King Coon's Day

Day to cook a 'coon,                    the whole thing  
tail, eyeballs and all  
The hair will burn dry and coarse  
while the eyes cook slack and seamless  
and that born two-fifths a jackal stench  
will stew through strong-        that pronounced odor  
you wouldn't sit by or share a bowl with  
or kiss.

Day to cook a 'coon, you say                    stuff the rump  
with basil and mint  
and gag its mouth with bay leaves  
Shackle it on a platter with onion birthstones,  
preparing it for your Sunday table  
between the hollandaise sauce  
and the candied yams.

Time to carve the 'coon;                    an unconscious slice  
down its back  
with a christ-kissed blade. Pin the skin back  
clear of the bone to see the blood inside  
boiled the color of kidney bean water, to smell the steam  
from swelled and deflated bladders. Now cut a good fat piece  
for each porcelain-skinned plate around the table,  
turning your nose and eyes away until each  
hirsute slab is smothered with steak gravy  
and the raccoon's hollow staring head is removed  
to the kitchen for your dog to hold in its callous mouth  
like a pill.

Five

Moonsliver, baby

baby, your thing ain't nothing  
but a chinese pea pod getting all steamed  
better calm it down, baby,  
before you're busting both little buttons

you ain't nothing to be thinking  
you're getting some gumption in my pockets  
don't think to be climbing on me  
without a kiss the size of salt on sting

I don't care how swelled your heart is,  
how fast you firecrack or damn you dazzle,  
I can't allow myself to be taken under by love  
and, baby, your thing ain't nothing.

## Husband Hunting

I'm going to get my rolling pin  
and go Krogering for a man,  
a nice meaty one with broad rump cheeks  
and fine-haired armpits thick as silky hops  
that I can press my face against on hot days  
and get drunk.

I mean it, I am finding a man  
and I don't want no kidney-pickled  
moon-eyed thing wilty as a drought weed,  
nor a fancy bottled man smelling like a casket  
parfum (though when he gets old I might  
can him in a Mason jar full of white lard  
and boil him in a pressure cooker  
to keep him looking good. I will kiss him  
through the green-blue glass, which won't be too bad  
because I'll have another fresher man in my bed  
by then) No,

See that man over there  
in that silver oldsmobile?  
I've set my mind on *him* today- a sweet young  
preacher- Well, this year I've had a dog catcher,  
my landlord, a bank president, and buried all  
three, so now I need the word of God!

It's true, I'm a dangerous sinner in bed  
but men know I'm the difference between tavern  
and townhouse so they climb on in. I  
rub up against them, the pores in my loving arms  
opening wide and sharp as the holes in a grater,  
while the solid of my torso becomes a skin-lined  
mortar. I romp and stroke them into a powder,  
poor men, rubbed sage seasoning the boiling stew  
in my heart with nothing but the soprano  
whisper of a moan as they slowly dissolve. I  
taste them for weeks on the back of my throat.

Now here comes a policeman  
walking like he made the ground.  
He could lock me in a jailcell if he knew I bragged  
about a collection of men's bones under my mattress,  
but I'd still get him. Not that I'm no Bermuda  
Triangle, *intending* to steal down the ships  
of my men, and anyway,  
he might be the one I'm looking for, the one  
who'll outlast me, the one who  
won't get old and worn.

1.

"The Evenings and the Nights of Cole Porter Years After the Accident" was inspired by the Cole Porter documentary "You're the Top" and by stories from Gerald Clarke's Capote, A Biography.

2.

In "5 Voices," part one was inspired by the painting "Slave Deck of the Albanoz" by Godfrey Meynell (1846). Part two was inspired by a photograph of two Japanese men and three white children in front of a sign that reads "Japs Dont Let The Sun Set On You Here..." (photographer unknown). Part Three is based on Hubert Selby, Jr.'s book Last Exit to Brooklyn and the film of the same name based on the book. Facts for part four were obtained from the book The Yellow Star.

3.

"O Heavy Horse" was inspired by the lines from Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, "O happy horse, / To bear the weight of Antony!"

4.

"Angels" contains two completed poems from a series in progress. This series will hopefully be subtle but strong in its advocacy of animal rights.